NCS MANAGER'S REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT'S NATIONAL SECURITY TELECOMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE XXIX MEETING

Background

- Over the past year, the National Communications System (NCS) intensified industry and Government cooperation to ensure the reliability and availability of national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) telecommunications and to improve the technology behind and delivery of its priority communications programs. The NCS also implemented telecommunications industry recommendations for improving incident response in the wake of natural disasters.

Hurricane Response – Katrina, Rita, and Wilma

- Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma struck in quick succession in 2005, testing NCS resources to their limits. The NCS, as the primary agency supporting the National Response Plan's (NRP) Emergency Support Function 2 (ESF#2), Communications Annex, undertook the following significant efforts to better prepare for the 2006 hurricane season:
  - Initiated revisions to the ESF#2 Operations Plan in response to challenges identified as a result of Hurricane Katrina and in anticipation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) review of the NRP.
  - Developed, in partnership with Federal, State, and local Government entities, as well as a private sector company, an access standard operating procedure (SOP) to ensure that private critical infrastructure responders have priority access to disaster areas. The access SOP has been adopted by the State of Georgia and is currently being used as an example for other States.
  - Supported the DHS review of the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance (Stafford) Act* to ensure that there is no room for interpretation that may hinder response efforts in the future. The DHS Office of the General Counsel is currently preparing an opinion on the use of the Stafford Act for completion in advance of the 2006 hurricane season.
  - Worked with the ESF community to assess the Government's ability to ensure industry priority access to fuel, security, temporary housing, and temporary staging sites for emergency responders.
  - Developed and implemented an ESF#2 Training and Response Improvement Program in response to lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina. The Program will require ESF#2 staff to participate in regular training and exercises to continually improve their proficiency.
  - Revised ESF#2 policies, plans, and procedures to reflect a new organizational structure and clearly define roles and responsibilities.
  - Assumed the lead coordination role for implementing recommendation 34(e) in the White House Report, *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned* — development of a National Emergency Communications Strategy — by May 31, 2006.
  - Supported the development of plans for deploying a reliable communications capability for emergency responders at all levels of Government in a disaster-inflicted region.
  - Inventoried the communications-related solutions available in the private sector that could be made available to the Government during future hurricane seasons.

Emergency Wireless Protocol

- Following the July 2005 bombings of the London public transportation system, the NCS worked closely with industry to develop a protocol for determining if and when cellular network connections should be terminated in an emergency. The NCS hosted a teleconference with the National Coordinating Center (NCC) industry members to discuss the development of this protocol and worked with several of the industry representatives on the President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) to develop an emergency wireless protocol for use by commercial and private wireless networks during national crises. This protocol has been implemented and designates the NCC as the focal point for coordinating any actions leading up to and following the termination of private wireless network connections.

Priority Communications Services

- During the 2005 hurricane season, the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS), Wireless Priority Service (WPS), Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP), and SHAred RESources (SHARES) High Frequency Radio programs all proved invaluable to emergency communications operations. Ninety-four percent of GETS calls made during a 25-day period following Hurricane Katrina were connected successfully, while 95 percent of WPS calls placed during the same timeframe successfully assigned a radio channel. During Hurricane Katrina, the NCS completed over 3,000 TSP assignments for Federal, State, local, and commercial emergency communications services, and the 431 stations participating in SHARES supported search and rescue operations and provided frequency coordination between several Government agencies. In addition, priority communications programs substantially increased the number of users from the prior year. The WPS program alone drew more than twice the number of subscriptions it had in 2004.

Next Generation Networks

- Over the past year, the NCS refined its approach to providing priority services within the next generation networks (NGN) environment. In August 2005, the NCS participated in an NSTAC-hosted subject matter experts meeting on incident management in the context of the NGN. The NCS also continued development of the Next Generation Priority Services Experimental Testbed Environment in 2005 to ensure that next generation emergency telecommunications services will operate end-to-end.

- In early 2005, the NCS completed its Internet Disruption Impact Analysis and issued its final report. As a follow on to this effort, the NCS partnered with DHS' National Cyber Security Division (NCSD) to establish the Internet Disruption Working Group, which examined Internet disruption with greater participation from and engagement with industry.

Office of Cyber Security and Telecommunications

- Newly realigned under the Office of Cyber Security and Telecommunications within the Preparedness Directorate, the NCS is now even better prepared to help the Department address NS/EP issues in a converged environment. The new Office pulls together the NCS and NCSD, greatly enhancing coordination and collaboration between the two divisions.

Homeland Security Policy Directive 7 Implementation

- Over the past year, the NCS partnered with industry to support DHS' efforts to revise the National Infrastructure Protection Plan (NIPP), mandated by Homeland Security Policy Directive 7, *Critical Infrastructure Identification, Prioritization, and Protection*. In addition, the NCS worked closely with the telecommunications industry to develop the Telecommunications Sector Specific Plan. In March 2006, the Department delivered the NIPP to the Homeland Security Council (HSC). Once the HSC concurs with the Plan, it will undergo the interagency signature process prior to its final release.

- To enable collaboration on policy issues and initiatives related to the NIPP, the NCS coordinated with industry to establish the Communications Sector Coordinating Council (C-SCC) and continued to serve as the managing agency for the Telecommunications Government Coordinating Council, the C-SCC's Government counterpart.

NCS Committee of Principals

- The NCS Committee of Principals' (COP) Priority Services Working Group finalized its report evaluating the TSP program and developed a white paper on the need for expanded use of DHS grants for TSP coverage for State and local responders. The COP's Continuity Communications Working Group (CCWG), through its Continuity Communications Enterprise Architecture Program Office, submitted two reports for COP approval detailing plans for implementing Federal continuity communications standards. Additionally, the COP initiated work to develop a process to better implement recommendations received from the NSTAC.

National Command Capability

- The NCS has been actively involved in the development of a National Command Capability, directly supporting the development of the strategic vision, the terms and reference document, and the program plan. Moving forward, the NCS will continue to play a role in the NCC, sharing the minimum communications capabilities developed by the COP's CCWG with the NCC Program Office.

Satellite Communications

- In response to the NSTAC's February 2004 Satellite Task Force Report, which recommended the identification of vulnerabilities in satellite communications and the development of plans to mitigate interference, the NCS initiated efforts to consider the capabilities and limitations of satellite systems when contemplating their use in a disaster environment. Furthermore, the NCS initiated work on a report, with an

expected completion date of September 2006, addressing vulnerabilities in the commercial satellite infrastructure.

Technology Program Enhancements

- The NCS continued testing technologies for their usefulness in providing Government agencies with backup telecommunications capabilities, completing two technology evaluation demonstrations in 2005 that proved the viability of Free Space Optics (FSO). One of those demonstrations was in partnership with the Defense Information Systems Agency and employed a hybrid FSO/Radio Frequency system. The other was a joint effort with the National Institute of Standards and Technology in which four different FSO systems were tested in disaster environments involving smoke and fire.

- Having previously developed a Route Diversity Methodology (RDM) to enable assessment of an agency's current level of route diversity, the NCS also designed an Abridged Route Diversity Methodology, a simplified version enabling agency self-assessment. In addition, the NCS hosted its first Route Diversity Forum with communications officials from Federal departments and agencies, which allowed the NCS to share findings and methodologies designed to create greater network route diversity within agencies' local communications networks.